

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 22, 2014

Agenda Item: Robb/Ledford Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease Renewal

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

A six-year grazing lease renewal is proposed with the Ledford Creek Grazing Association (LCGA) on Robb/Ledford WMA. The lease involves grazing up to 2,955 cattle AUMs annually on 32,368 acres—the Robb/Ledford Coordinated Grazing System. The system includes 17,302 acres of FWP deeded, 10,786 acres of Dept. of Natural Resource Conservation leased by FWP, 3,600 acres of DNRC leased by the LCGA, and 680 acres of federal Bureau of Land Management leased by the LCGA. Since 2000, FWP used grazing leases with the LCGA to help meet the following management plan objectives: (1) maintenance or improvement of basic resources including vegetation, soil, and water; (2) expanding benefits of FWP management to adjacent DNRC, BLM, and USFS lands; (3) showcase the WMA as an area where wildlife and livestock co-exist while maintaining healthy rangelands; (4) provide winter forage for elk; (5) provide habitat for all wildlife using the WMA; (6) incorporate adjacent public lands into WMA management; (7) provide adequate public access; (8) maintain the natural character of the land; and (9) increase public awareness and appreciation for the diversity of wildlife on the WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results

A draft Environmental Assessment was completed and released for public comment March 19—April 25. Comment addressed in a Decision Notice and made available prior to Commission consideration.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternative A would continue the current grazing system lease with LCGA at the standard grazing rate. The grazing system would run from June 22—Oct. 15, with a maximum of 2,955 AUMs. FWP would assume all fence and waterline maintenance and repair responsibilities.

Alternative B would continue the current system but the lease to LCGA would be for the lower (DNRC) rate and LCGA would assume all fence and waterline maintenance and repair responsibilities.

Alternative C would discontinue the grazing lease and halt all grazing on the WMA.

Benefits of Alternatives A and B include maintaining productive elk winter range forage, increased tolerance of elk from area livestock producers, reduction of private lands/elk conflicts, and continued collaborative land management efforts involving FWP, DNRC, BLM, USFS, and livestock producers. Alternative C would lose the landscape benefits of the grazing arrangement and would abandon the considerable investment in this system, but this alternative would likely result in a reduction in site specific grazing impacts (e.g., watering sites, livestock concentration areas). Deteriorated riparian impacts have been noted in the Rock/Swamp Creek area but it is unclear whether the grazing lease is linked to these impacts.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Approve the six-year lease under Alternative B, which would make LCGA responsible for fence and water maintenance. Overall, this system is meeting stated objectives for the WMA. Regarding the Rock/Swamp creek area, FWP will work to determine causative agent(s) resulting in deteriorated riparian conditions and will identify actions for correcting these conditions.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve renewal of the grazing lease for six years on Robb/Ledford WMA at the lower (DNRC) fee rate.